

CRIME AND RACE: Conceptions and Misconceptions, by MARVIN E. WOLFGANG, Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania. Number 6 in Pamphlet Series by Institute of Human Relations Press of the American Jewish Committee, New York City.

Judge Learned Hand on May 20, 1945, at his second "I am an American Day" address in Central Park in New York City, stated:

"Right knows no boundaries and justice no frontiers; the brotherhood of man is not a domestic institution".

Alas! Professor Wolfgang's cogent and searching study of statistics, "Crime and Race—Conceptions and Misconceptions" demonstrates all too clearly that in today's imperfect world the matter of punishment for crimes against the person does appear to have some relation to both race and national origins.

Justice may know no physical boundaries, as Judge Hand said, but the result of offenses against laws does seem to fall with disturbing variations of force in a fashion that has no connection with our ideals of justice. For bringing out the basic data we owe a debt of gratitude to the Institute of Human Relations Press, one of the projects established by the American Jewish Committee in carrying out its goal to improve standards of human relations among all segments of the population.

Most of us who are not specially active in the field undoubtedly feel from newspaper reading that in city life today criminal aggression by Negroes against whites is considerably more frequent than by whites against Negroes. However, Professor Wolfgang's study shows that in fact in a five-year period studied by him in Philadelphia white crimes of homicide against Negroes were three times as frequent as similar crimes of Negroes against whites.

Rape, like other crimes of violence studied by Professor Wolfgang, is demonstrated (contrary to the belief of many) to be primarily a crime committed within the color, or racial origin group, of the offender. In a two-year period in Philadelphia 93% of the 616 cases of rape reported involved either two whites or two Negroes. Out of the 44 cases (only 3.6%) involving two persons of different color, the male offender was white in 23 cases and Negro in 21 cases.

Dr. Wolfgang concludes that "the Negro crime rate would not be substantially different" from that of the white race if the circumstances of birth, education and opportunities for advancement were comparable for the two groups. Certainly no one of us on this planet Earth had any personal share of responsibility for the kind of envelope into which our respective souls were born, and the body which we leave behind at death has no more relation to the person than a discarded empty envelope.

A few publicized cases of interracial violent crimes may create public beliefs which are not borne out by actual data. Such conclusions as are here authoritatively presented deserve wide publicity, to spur the efforts of the people to accept individuals on the basis of their inherent qualities. Color of an individual's hair plays no part in the acceptance of that person by others. Why should the similar accident of the color of the skin bring about different results? One reason for past differences in such treatment is a hazy belief that black skin and greater incidence of crimes of violence somehow

are related. Dr. Wolfgang's statistics indicate that this is in all likelihood nonsense.

He does however add that the status of being a Negro appears to involve more risk of involvement with law enforcement processes than the status of being white, according to the 1959 study of "Criminology and Penology" by R. R. Korn and L. W. McCarkle. Some part of this greater risk (a part which as yet is of unknown extent) must be the result of "differential legal and penal treatment of whites and Negroes," it is stated.

Here is the point at which the organized Bar of this country is directing much attention, through the national Voluntary Defender movement and similar efforts to provide fair opportunities for impartial treatment in the administration of justice for all accused persons, regardless of financial means, racial origin or other circumstances not relevant to the matter of guilt or innocence.

The United States Supreme Court's decision in the *Gideon* case was an important step toward that goal. Another step in the same direction is the recent action of the Philadelphia Bar Association by an overwhelming majority in a largely attended meeting in adopting a code designed to limit the wide-spread dissemination outside the courtroom through printed matter and on the air of material which would not be admissible evidence in court, but which if thus circulated outside would almost inevitably affect the jury charged with the duty of passing upon the matter in Court.

As Professor Wolfgang states in his conclusion, "the development of organized movements to increase the opportunities of all is an index of society's awareness of this difference between what Sheldon Glueck calls destiny and destination." With the growth of better understanding among individuals, and "as knowledge replaces misconceptions" (using Dr. Wolfgang's words) the "destination" of each individual in his life is more likely to coincide with his true "destiny" than to be some way-station to which he has been shunted by misconceptions encountered on his way through life.

The material in this little study deserves wide-spread circulation. Even more does it deserve a following up by more detailed national study of such statistical data as are now available and of local weaknesses in attitudes and administration which may be eliminated by better understanding and forceful community action.

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